

Protecting and Restoring the Health and Resilience of Sierra Nevada Watersheds and Communities

Implementation of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Strategic Plan:
Actions for 2019-2020

Introduction to the Action Plan

This Action Plan (Action Plan) was developed in parallel with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's (SNC) 2019-2024 Strategic Plan Securing California's Environmental and Economic Future: Protecting and Restoring the Health and Resilience of Sierra Nevada Watersheds and Communities (Strategic Plan) and sets forth the actions needed to implement the first 18 months of the Strategic Plan's goals and strategies. Together, these plans set priorities for the SNC within the context of its broad mission, statutorily established program areas, Board direction, and the 2017 strategic planning process.

Plan Update Frequency

The Action Plan will be updated annually. The new draft Action Plan will be submitted to the Governing Board for review and adoption each June beginning in 2020. Each update will revise the proposed actions in the context of changing circumstances, new Regional developments, and available resources. If necessary, staff may take additional actions consistent with the Strategic Plan and report to the Board on such actions. Staff may also recommend changes to the Action Plan between scheduled updates to the Governing Board for consideration.

Design and Intent

The Action Plan is designed to guide SNC activities over eighteen months starting January 1, 2019. The SNC is committed to bringing other agencies and partners onboard and acting as a catalyst to create a more-coordinated and holistic approach to restoring the health and resilience of these watersheds and communities.

Actions have been developed to implement the strategies identified to help achieve the specified Sierra Nevada Regional Goals. The five Regional Goals identified in the Strategic Plan are:

Healthy Watersheds and Forests	Vibrant Recreation and Tourism
Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities	Impactful Regional Identity
Strategic Lands Conserved	

Not all strategies will be implemented in the first phase of the Strategic Plan, so not all strategies will have actions associated with them in any given year. Likewise, actions to implement any given strategy may take place over more than one year of the Strategic Plan, showing up in more than one Action Plan.

WIP Implementation, Related Program Activities, and Rapid-Response Projects

SNC staff will undertake a variety of activities that are essential to effectively implement this Action Plan but do not lend themselves to specific actions in the Strategic Plan. This

includes coordination activities for the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP), tribal interactions, a number of administrative functions, and data and technology support. Activities of note include:

- **Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program Coordination:** With the elevation of the WIP as the SNC's overarching program, and with the approval of the Strategic and Action Plans, a new body of work will be developed to ensure effective application of the WIP, inclusive of and beyond healthy watersheds and forests. Activities will include general oversight of plan implementation along with specific, focused activities. These activities will include convening the Annual WIP Summit to educate key decision-makers and funders about Regional needs, issues, and opportunities and to involve them in the development of proactive, multi-agency solutions to address watershed and forest health and other Regional Goal-related issues.
- **Sierra Nevada Strategic Investment Program (SNSIP):** Building off the restoration needs identified under the WIP and integrating the various agencies' own funding priorities, a watershed-scale investment program will be designed to create a strategic, coordinated investment plan to maximize public investment and outcomes in the Sierra Nevada. The SNSIP will not usurp partner agency priorities or programs, but will rather integrate, leverage, and harmonize various funding efforts to restore the health and resilience of Sierra Nevada watersheds and communities in the face of climate change.
- **Tribal Outreach, Interaction, and Support:** California Native American tribes are significant and valuable partners across the Sierra Nevada Region. While this Action Plan includes some actions that are specifically focused on collaboration with tribes, there are also several other important ongoing activities that will continue, including conducting effective government-to-government consultation. The SNC will continue to explore innovative approaches to engage tribes in the programs of the SNC as opportunities are identified.
- **All Conservancies Partnership:** Another partnership important to the health and resilience of the Sierra Nevada is with the other nine [Conservancies](#) of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). Together with the SNC, these Conservancies are dedicated to restoring, preserving, and protecting California's natural resources, including water supply, quality and quantity, habitat and critical ecosystems, forests, cultural and historical resources, recreation/tourism, economic development, and human resources and communities. Together, the Conservancies bring important resources and perspectives to the table, addressing upper and lower watershed problems from the Sierra to the Sea. The SNC continues to support and lead efforts to coordinate activities of the Conservancies to connect, create, and implement the holistic approach envisioned in its Strategic Plan, benefitting all of California and its citizens.

Furthermore, the SNC periodically undertakes quick-turnaround projects to further its mission. Examples of these might be compiling research or developing story maps and fact sheets that are especially timely. Due to the nature of these opportunities, the SNC

has termed them rapid-response projects and anticipates doing more of them as needs arise. Any such projects would be consistent with and focused on implementation of adopted programs and strategies.

Administrative Functions

Administrative activities and support are vital to the success of the SNC. However, because much of the impact of the administrative staff are behind the scenes, this Action Plan does not include specific administrative activities. Even so, during the implementation of the Action Plan, the SNC administrative team will continue to carry out various administrative functions that will support the effective and efficient completion of the actions noted below to achieve and implement the Regional Goals and Strategies. For example:

- **Fiscal Services:** The SNC fiscal staff provides budgeting and accounting services that are vital to the implementation of the grants program and overall operational activities of the SNC. The fiscal staff interacts with the CNRA bond program and various control agencies, including the Department of Finance and the State Controllers' Office, to provide essential resources and ensure fiduciary accountability and transparency in all aspects of the SNC's activities.
- **Human Resources:** The SNC's employees are the organization's most valuable asset. The focus of SNC's human resources program is to keep staff healthy, happy, and productive. Human Resource professionals provide and implement guiding policies, ensure the staff is paid on time, develop and deliver effective training activities, and implement health and safety programs.
- **Technology:** Critical to all SNC programs are the hardware, software, and networks that make up its core technology services. Working with the CNRA and the California Department of Technology, SNC's information technology (IT) staff develops, monitors, and implements programs that support the communications and core operational activities of the SNC.
- **Legal Services and Government Accountability:** The legal staff provides critical analyses and guidance in the development of legal positions/actions and in the implementation of laws, rules, and regulations. Legal staff also assists in the more-complicated aspects of contract law compliance.
- **Business Services:** Business services staff literally keeps the heat and lights on, contractors paid, and vehicles moving in support of daily staff activities. Business services staff makes sure critical contracts and provision of necessary supplies are provided to carry out the mission of the SNC; that they are handled in compliance with Department of General Services' laws, rules, and guidelines; and that all related policies are applied appropriately.

SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY ACTION PLAN

The following presents the major actions to be undertaken by the SNC between January 2019 and June 2020, consistent with the SNC's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. Staff will use this Action Plan to guide activities in the coming eighteen months. Should circumstances lead to other initiatives or activities being undertaken, staff will provide the Board with updated information at a subsequent Board Meeting. Staff will report on implementation of the Action Plan after its completion.

HEALTHY WATERSHEDS AND FORESTS

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Build and improve upon the WIP assessment work already completed and continue to assess needs of, opportunities for, and impediments to restoration of Sierra Nevada forests, meadows, streams, lakes, and oak woodlands throughout the Region.

Action 1: Identify and enhance forest and watershed health and/or prioritization assessments. House and display information in the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN). Use results to identify restoration needs and impediments and to support planning and funding decisions.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Actively support the development and continued implementation of collaborative approaches at the Regional, watershed, and local levels to address forest and watershed health; provide leadership in promoting strategic alignment of projects across the landscape.

Action 1: Provide technical, funding, and fund-development assistance to and participate in, organize, and convene collaborative efforts seeking to address watershed and forest health and resilience on Subregional, watershed, or local levels.

Action 2: Engage existing and new partners to 1) promote cross-collaborative communication, sharing strategies, and best practices and 2) identify and implement the best tools and agreements to formalize partnerships in support of further strategic alignment across the Region.

Action 3: Identify and actively participate in various statewide groups, coalitions, or other cross agency, urban-rural partnerships advocating for and promoting proactive, science-based, ecologically sound forest management practices to reduce the risk of severe wildfire and improve forest resilience.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 3: Distribute available funds for watershed and forest restoration and protection in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact; coordinate with

other state and federal funding agencies to ensure appropriate investment in the Sierra Nevada.

- Action 1: Develop and implement a grant program that funds watershed and forest health projects that will contribute to restoring health and resilience at the landscape scale.
- Action 2: Administer Climate Change Investment Funds and Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Funds on grants and projects that SNC is responsible for implementing.
- Action 3: Utilize tools such as the meadow restoration assessment tool developed by the Sierra Nevada Meadows Partnership to guide funding decisions for meadow restoration in the Region.

Strategy 4: Advocate for and secure increased funding for watershed protection and restoration work in the Region, including funding for SNC and other agencies and organizations.

- Action 1: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Strategic Investment Program (SNSIP) to coordinate partners and funding programs, maximizing strategic investment and restoration and resilience impacts at the landscape scale, including biomass and wood utilization infrastructure development in the Sierra Nevada.

Policy

Strategy 5: Educate key decision-makers and funders on the critical need for forest and watershed management activities, including the use of prescribed and managed fire, to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

- Action 1: Organize Sierra Nevada Regional tours, briefings, and meetings to educate policy-makers, media, and beneficiaries about current Sierra needs and issues, the value of forest restoration activities, and to demonstrate new science related to policy opportunities.
- Action 2: Participate in the Fire MOU Workgroup and engage air quality regulators in identifying and influencing policy constraints and opportunities to increase the use of fire as a restoration tool for watersheds and forests.
- Action 3: Engage in legislative outreach, advocate for actions that support watershed and forest restoration at the landscape level, and track and provide input on proposed legislation, as appropriate, to influence and ensure that policy and funding decisions have positive impacts on forest and watershed health.

Strategy 6: Identify and share science with decision-makers and those that influence them to take informed action and influence policy to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

- Action 1: Identify and track current scientific research and trends affecting Sierra forests and watersheds and utilize various methods and tools to convey compelling and clear messaging about the current and projected conditions, the need for forest and watershed restoration activities, the results of management actions, and the consequences of inaction.
- Action 2: Conduct research and/or convene scientific teams and panels to complete and publish economic and environmental analyses and best practices related to watershed and forest restoration.

Strategy 7: Identify and advocate for improvements to state and federal environmental review processes affecting forest and watershed restoration projects designed to protect and improve watershed health and resilience.

No Actions Recommended for Year 1.

Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 8: Establish and continue engagement in pilot projects across landscapes and ownerships that test new governance, finance, and implementation tools to increase the pace and scale of watershed restoration.

- Action 1: Provide staff assistance, technical assistance, and other resources to the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI), the Southern Sierra Leadership Forum, and other collaboratives to prioritize, plan, and fund innovative pilot projects.
- Action 2: Provide staff assistance, technical assistance, and other resources in support of partner efforts to design, test, and evaluate climate-smart restoration approaches aimed at enhancing the ecological function of degraded ecosystems in a manner that prepares them for the consequences of climate change.
- Action 3: Work with TCSI Science Enterprise and other vested and knowledgeable stakeholders to define resilience and identify performance measures and on-the-ground management activities that promote forest resilience.
- Action 4: Identify and test innovative financing to incentivize establishing biomass/wood utilization facilities within or near the Sierra Nevada Region.

Strategy 9: Implement more-efficient landscape planning and environmental impact review processes to get work done in watersheds on public and private lands.

- Action 1: Work with partners to develop a set of recommendations for more-efficient environmental planning based on lessons learned in the TCSI landscape and elsewhere.

Action 2: Provide funding and staff support to plan and implement large landscape-level environmental planning.

Strategy 10: Increase the use of Master Stewardship Agreements, Good Neighbor Agreements, Cost Share Agreements, Joint Powers Agreements, Tribal Agreements, and other administrative agreements, as appropriate, to increase the pace and scale of ecological watershed restoration.

Action 1: Implement restoration projects utilizing SNC's Good Neighbor Agreements (GNAs) with federal agencies.

Action 2: Provide technical and financial support for the development of these administrative Agreements and make them available within the Region.

RESILIENT SIERRA NEVADA COMMUNITIES

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Work with partners to determine the role/s that SNC can play in assisting communities dealing with climate change and other resulting economic and social impacts.

Action 1: Engage with existing workforce/economic development organizations, local governments, tribes, the private sector and community organizations to better understand existing programs, unmet needs, and opportunities for SNC actions and support.

Strategy 2: Coordinate with workforce development organizations, established state working groups, local community colleges, tribes, and communities to determine the best way/s to meet workforce needs associated with watershed restoration, forest products infrastructure, sustainable recreation and tourism, and working landscapes.

Action 1: Provide technical, policy, and funding support, as appropriate, to partners with existing or developing programs, including replicating or expanding successful models that develop tribal workforce crews to implement watershed and forest restoration.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 3: Develop and implement collaborative approaches that enhance community resiliency and bring entities together to solve problems and overcome obstacles.

Action 1: Support and participate in efforts to establish new workforce internships or service programs focused on planning and implementing forest health projects and wood products/biomass utilization.

Strategy 4: Build capacity and greater community resilience in local governments, communities, organizations, and tribes throughout the Region.

- Action 1: Provide training and technical assistance to local communities and counties across the Region, as needed, in the development of grant-writing, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance, project administration, reporting and management, and other related topics.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 5: Distribute available funds in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact, multiple co-benefits, and leverage other state and federal funding agencies to improve community resiliency throughout the Region.

- Action 1: Develop and implement a grant program to support local community capacity-building, including ways to provide for increased biomass infrastructure, watershed restoration workforce development, and training/support to increase organizational capacity across the Region.
- Action 2: Develop and implement a grant program to support innovative wood products/mass timber and wood product manufacturing consistent with the Forest Carbon Plan, Wood Products Working Group, and SNC's Strategic Plan.
- Action 3: Manage National Disaster Resilience Competition Biomass Utilization Facility and Forest and Watershed Health Program funds, including grants and revolving loans, to maximize economic and environmental impact and provide demonstration of an integrated approach to addressing post-fire forest and community resilience with the goal of expanding application of federal funds to resilience work in the Sierra Nevada.

Strategy 6: Advocate for and secure funding to increase community resilience throughout the Region, including funding for SNC and other agencies and organizations.

- Action 1: Identify and distribute information in support of utilizing designations including [Opportunity Zones](#) to incentivize investment in local communities.

Policy

Strategy 7: Working with partners, identify policy changes that will assist in increased community resilience.

- Action 1: Engage in legislative outreach and advocacy to increase biomass infrastructure, workforce development, and watershed and forest restoration at the landscape level and track and provide input on proposed legislation, as appropriate, to influence and ensure policy and funding decisions have positive impacts on community resilience throughout the Region.

VIBRANT RECREATION AND TOURISM

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Assess conditions, existing resources, needs, and opportunities to support or promote recreation and tourism throughout the Region and identify highest-priority activities for the organization.

- Action 1: Working with partners, design and implement a Regional recreation/tourism needs assessment to 1) identify the most urgent needs and greatest opportunities to support continued development of sustainable recreation and tourism across the Region; 2) define the role/s that the SNC can and should play, considering the organization's mission, resources, and skillsets; and 3) guide SNC actions in supporting sustainable recreation and tourism through its Strategic and Action Plans for the next five years.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Identify, create, and participate in partnerships to support the development of vibrant recreation and tourism throughout the Region.

- Action 1: Provide technical assistance, communication support, and resources to promote the development of formal and informal partnerships among the stakeholders engaged in sustainable outdoor recreation and tourism, such as the Sierra Nevada Geotourism project.
- Action 2: Support programs such as the California Watchable Wildlife Program and the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks, and Tourism by participating as members in programs that support the development and expansion of recreation and tourism throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 3: Distribute available funds for development of sustainable recreation and tourism throughout the Region, in a timely and strategic manner, to achieve maximum positive impact, coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies and partners.

- Action 1: Develop and implement a grant program to support pilot recreation and/or tourism collaboratives or Regional initiatives.

Strategy 4: Advocate for and secure increased funding for sustainable recreation and tourism development and access to public lands in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations.

- Action 1: Identify funding and other resources dedicated to recreation and tourism and provide direct assistance to partners to secure resources for recreation and tourism projects.

Action 2: Work with other state partners to identify, support, or develop projects or programs that help achieve state recreation priorities.

Action 3: Provide technical, financial, and/or staff support for community-led efforts to establish funding streams for tourism and recreation development or marketing as well as recreation facilities investment and development.

Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 5: Provide assistance to pilot projects or collaboratives that test innovative governance, finance, and implementation tools that can achieve sustainable recreation and tourism objectives across the Region.

Action 1: Provide technical and staff support to partners in establishing pilot recreation collaboratives or Regional initiatives to address recreation and tourism-related challenges.

Action 2: Initiate a study to understand the impacts of severe wildfire on the recreation economy in the Sierra Nevada.

STRATEGIC LANDS CONSERVED

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Assess the land conservation priorities of other agencies and partners, climate vulnerability assessments, and existing funding programs to identify the highest-priority SNC activities to support strategic land conservation.

Action 1: Work with the land conservation community to update and enhance Regional land conservation inventories for priority/needs to inform the actions of various state funding agencies and ensure strategic decision-making. Assessment should include identification of land conservation objectives for targeted lands, potential enhancement of benefits from additional/modified management activities, and context of lands as it relates to other activities in the watershed.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 2: Distribute available funds, according to their criteria, in a timely and strategic manner to realize maximum positive benefit.

Action 1: Develop and implement a land conservation grant program, taking into account the focus and priorities of other funding sources and utilizing strategic assessment.

Strategy 3: Advocate for and secure increased funding for strategic land conservation in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations.

Action 1: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Strategic Investment Program (SNSIP) to engage with land conservation agencies and partners to increase the strategic

investment for land conservation projects in the Region, including the design and testing of climate-smart approaches to private land conservation.

Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 4: Work with land trusts and other conservation partners to design and test climate-smart approaches to private land conservation, including, but not limited to, conservation easement agreements with provisions allowing for active management and ecological restoration, multi-benefit management plans, and long-term ecological monitoring programs to evaluate success.

Action 1: Continue to monitor lands donated to USFS and fulfill other duties as agreed to in the MOU with Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council.

Strategy 5: Work with SNC County Boardmembers to identify opportunities to improve the cooperation and consultation process and explore utilization of land use planning tools for conservation purposes.

Action 1: Survey SNC County Boardmembers to identify opportunities to improve the cooperation and consultation process on conservation projects in their counties that are recommended for SNC funding.

Action 2: Address tax neutrality concerns through the grant development and evaluation phases, providing for favorable consideration of project proposals that result in property tax neutrality.

IMPACTFUL REGIONAL IDENTITY

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 1: Work strategically with partners to share messaging, communicate lessons learned across the Region, and amplify partner needs and successes in a way that showcases how valuable work in the Sierra is to California and educates decision-makers about actions they can take to support, expand, and improve that work.

Action 1: Establish an in-Region communications network that amplifies partner efforts in each Regional Goal area and supports sharing messaging and lessons learned among partners.

Strategy 2: Identify and engage leaders and influencers in urban and downstream communities that benefit from the Sierra Nevada.

Action 1: Conduct one or more convenings with urban leaders in areas that have direct benefits from healthy Sierra watersheds in order to provide information and explore partnership opportunities in support of restoration activities.

- Action 2: Develop and engage in communication activities, such as social media campaigns, LiveStream videos, traditional media interviews, conference panel presentations, and one-on-one meetings with key decision-makers, that provide key influencers with opportunities to advocate for actions needed in the Sierra Nevada.

***Strategy 3:** Build and maintain SNC's science and research network to ensure that the SNC remains a credible source for science-based policy recommendations.*

- Action 1: Review key relevant research papers and studies, engage directly with scientists and authors, and communicate on key findings to inform SNC policy actions.

***Strategy 4:** Build and maintain SNC's media network to enhance the SNC's reputation as a credible voice for the Sierra Nevada Region. Use sound science and data to become the 'go-to' place for information and stories about the Sierra.*

- Action 1: Create an online library of images, fact sheets, visuals, and other media that explains the issues the Region is facing and highlights new science and solutions (including SNC work), making information available to communication campaigns, interested news agencies, and other parties.

Funding and Investments

***Strategy 5:** Seek funding to bolster and support communications efforts that elevate the image of the Sierra Nevada and educate Californians on the benefits of healthy California watersheds and forests.*

No actions recommended for Year 1.

Policy

***Strategy 6:** Educate and influence decision- and policy-makers to benefit the Sierra Nevada Region, particularly as it relates to climate change response, adaptation planning, and increasing the pace and scale of ecological restoration.*

- Action 1: Produce an SNC report on impacts and opportunities that would serve as a Region-wide assessment, clearly communicating the benefits of healthy California watersheds/forests and the risks of continued underfunded programs, making the link between beneficiaries and needed funding.
- Action 2: Utilize new or existing communications tools to provide regular communication with key audiences regarding environmental events, science, and policy responses. Among other things, use these tools to interpret and push new and emerging research to land managers, policy-makers, and partners.

- Action 3: Coordinate with partners to enhance the impact of messages that include the importance of watershed restoration to increase resilience, protect communities, and provide important ecosystem services. Utilize SNC's social media, traditional media, and partnership networks to distribute these messages.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 7: Create outreach and education campaigns/events that encourage beneficiaries to get to know their watersheds through learning activities throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.

- Action 1: Continue and create outreach and education efforts that build Regional identity, connect Sierra benefits with beneficiaries, and share a holistic story of the needs of the Sierra. Develop new and update existing materials that focus on the Regional Goals, including various fact sheets, project case studies, brochures, and blog and social media postings.
- Action 2: Maintain and enhance an active SNC social media presence by sharing new science, promoting SNC's and others' relevant events, encouraging partners to reference SNC resources, amplifying key partners' outreach efforts, and connecting SNC issues with urban beneficiaries. Develop and use videos and infographics to effectively deliver compelling and urgent messages.
- Action 3: Collaborate with Regional partners to create events that encourage environmental service projects such as the Great Sierra River Cleanup.

Strategy 8: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to capture data in a spatial way and/or showcase relevant data that demonstrates how watershed restoration in the Sierra Nevada is critical to the Region and state.

- Action 1: Using data relating to each Regional Goal as developed in the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network, develop a Resilience Dashboard that will further define watershed, forest, and community resilience and identify resilience status for the Region, forests, communities, and individual watersheds of the Sierra Nevada.